

New York Post.- 14.09.2022

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## **putin rejected Ukraine peace deal struck by aide as war began: report**

***путін відкинув мирну угоду щодо України, укладену помічником, коли почалася війна***

*Журналістка С.Фарберов, посилаючись на дані Reuters, пише, що заступник глави адміністрації президента рф Д. Козак на початку війни нібито сказав путіну, що уклав тимчасову угоду з Києвом, яка б задовольнила вимогу росії про те, щоб Україна залишилася поза НАТО. Але путін, за даними Reuters, відхилив цю пропозицію і продовжив свою кампанію. Радник голови Офісу Президента України М. Подоляк, заявив, що росія використала переговори як димову завісу для підготовки до свого вторгнення, російська сторона ніколи не була зацікавлена в мирному врегулюванні.*

<https://nypost.com/2022/09/14/putin-rejected-ukraine-peace-deal-struck-by-aide-as-war-began/>

Russian President Vladimir Putin scrapped a peace deal with Ukraine that had been negotiated by his top envoy at the start of the war, and instead forged ahead with the bloody invasion to conquer more of the neighboring country's territory, a new report claims.

The Ukrainian-born envoy, Dmitry Kozak, told the Russian president at the early stages of the conflict that he believed the provisional agreement he had hammered out with Kyiv would prevent Ukraine from joining NATO — and remove the need for Moscow to pursue a large-scale occupation of Ukraine, according to three people close to the Kremlin speaking exclusively to Reuters.

Putin, 69, had repeatedly claimed before the war that NATO was creeping closer to Russia's borders by accepting new members from eastern Europe, and that the alliance was now preparing to bring Ukraine into the fold as well. Putin publicly said that the prospect of Ukraine's membership in NATO represented an existential threat to Russia, forcing him to react.

But, despite earlier backing the peace talks, Putin made it clear when presented with Kozak's deal that the concessions negotiated by his trusted deputy chief of staff did not go far enough, the sources said. He expanded his objectives to include annexing portions of Ukrainian territory.

Asked about Reuters report, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov categorically denied that Putin had pulled the plug on a peace deal, saying: "That has absolutely no relation to reality. No such thing ever happened. It is absolutely incorrect information."

Kozak did not respond to requests for comment sent via the Kremlin.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said Russia had used the negotiations as a smokescreen to prepare for its invasion, now in its seventh month, but he did not respond to questions about the substance of the talks nor confirm that a preliminary deal was reached.

"Today, we clearly understand that the Russian side has never been interested in a peaceful settlement," Podolyak said.

Two of the three sources said a push to get the deal finalized occurred immediately after Russia's Feb. 24 invasion. Within days, Kozak believed he had Ukraine's agreement to the main terms Russia had been seeking and recommended to Putin that he sign an agreement, the sources said.

“After Feb. 24, Kozak was given carte blanche: they gave him the green light; he got the deal. He brought it back and they told him to clear off. Everything was canceled. Putin simply changed the plan as he went along,” said one of the sources close to the Russian leadership.

The third source — who was told about the events by people who were briefed on the discussions between Kozak and Putin — differed on the timing, saying Kozak had proposed the deal to Putin, and had it rejected, just before the invasion.

Kozak, 63, has been a loyal lieutenant to Putin since working with him in the 1990s in the St. Petersburg mayor’s office. He’s been the president’s deputy chief of staff since Jan. 2020, after previously serving as deputy prime minister for 12 years.

Kozak was well-placed to negotiate a peace deal because since Putin had tasked him in 2020 with conducting talks about the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, which has been controlled by Russian-backed separatists following an uprising in 2014.

After leading the Russian delegation in talks with Ukrainian officials in Berlin on Feb. 10 — brokered by France and Germany — Kozak told a late-night news conference that the latest round of those negotiations had ended without a breakthrough.

Kozak also was one of those present when, three days before the invasion, Putin gathered his military and security chiefs and key aides in the Kremlin’s Yekaterinsky hall for a meeting of Russia’s Security Council.

State television cameras recorded part of the meeting, where Putin laid out plans to give formal recognition to separatist entities in eastern Ukraine.

Once the cameras were ushered out of the vast room with its neo-classical columns and domed ceiling, Kozak spoke out against Russia taking any steps to escalate the situation with Ukraine, said two of the three people close to the Russian leadership, as well as a third person who learned about what happened from people who took part in the meeting.

Another person interviewed by Reuters, who helped in the post-invasion talks, said discussions fell apart in early March when Ukrainian officials understood Putin was committed to pressing ahead with the large-scale invasion.

Six months on from the start of the war, Kozak remains in his high-placed post within the Kremlin, but he is no longer handling matters related to Ukraine, according to six of the sources who spoke to Reuters.

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“From what I can see, Kozak is nowhere to be seen,” said a source close to the separatist leadership in eastern Ukraine

Video shows Russian fighter jet crashing after takeoff in Crimea